CONCEPTS OF THE SUPERNATURAL

SUPERNATURAL ENTITIES

771 775 The Sanpoil divided contemporary supernatural entities possessing powers of volition into five distinct categories. All of these will be discussed below but a brief description of each seems advisable here. There was first the soul, that which animated the human body. It was conceived as a visceral entity, "partitioned off in the body next to the heart." (John Tom) It could not leave the body without causing death. The native term for this concept was sʌxapi'uts. When the corporeal body died the soul departed and either immediately went to the land of the dead, where it was oblivious, or stayed on earth and roamed about in the 776 transformed nature of a ghost. A ghost was called skʉ'susqa'. The next class was that of spirits. These existed in tremendous numbers. They were thought of as existing in the form of animals, plants, inanimate objects and physical phenomena. It was one of these that was sought by the youth on his guardian spirit quests. Once obtained, such a spirit became an integral part of one's total self. It could not be lost without serious physical consequences, often death. It was known as one's sumi'x^{a}. Upon the death of an individual his guardian spirit did not disappear or cease to exist but underwent a change analogous to the transformation from soul to ghost. I have called this entity the spirit-ghost. It could be taken by a relative of the person who had possessed it as a spirit, or by a shaman, as a secondary "power." The native term for the spirit-ghost was papa'iut. The final category included all "dangerous beings." These were ogres, monsters, demons, evil dwarfs. The native class name was s'twana'it.

775 A soul was possessed by every human being regardless of age. Even a fetus was considered as having a soul. Owing to its intimate, indetachable connection with the body of flesh it was never seen nor was it conceived as possessing a definite 753 form. It was localized next to the heart, but was never identified with the heart. 775 In dreams and illnesses it did not leave. The loss of one's spirit caused illness, 757 but dreams were not explained in this or any other supernatural fashion. Uncon- 828 sciousness, however, was interpreted as departure of the soul. This was not inconsistent with the belief that the soul only left the body at death; unconsciousness was looked upon as temporary death. No linguistic distinction was made (itlʌ·'t, "dead," "unconscious").

775 A ghost was a disembodied soul but in departing from the body it took on form, which was sometimes visible. It was not necessary, however, for a soul ever to become a ghost. If certain formalized procedures were strictly adhered to by the dying man and post mortem precautions taken by his relatives, the soul proceeded immediately to the land of the dead.[1]

The land of the dead was indefinitely located in the sky, at the end of the Milky Way. The latter was called the "trail of the dead." A soul in reaching the land of the dead always traversed the trail. The destination was a place of total

[1]See pages 149 f.

Though two brothers might both have the grizzly, or any other animal, as guardian spirit, twins did not have grizzly power more often than other people. 776 825 845

The power inherited from a dead relative belongs in a separate category. It was one of the powers which the dead had possessed during life, but after his death it chose a new master. It was never deliberately sought, as other powers were, but came in a dream. It brought considerable danger to the person on whom it called, being "meaner" and more exacting than a normal guardian spirit; and it might, if not duly propitiated, cause the death of its possessor. 778 428 787

Insanity was regarded as a kind of power, though not from any animal. A man recently went mad "because he wanted power too much." 778 828

The strength of one's power depended on the number of guardian spirits which he had and on their qualities. In the opinion of any one informant, the same animal did not confer varying degrees of power. Cecile seemed to think that power was directly proportional to the actual strength of the animal that bestowed it, and that that of cougar, grizzly, and eagle was therefore the strongest. But other informants denied this, saying that the power of any burrowing animal was stronger than that of deer, that small birds gave great power, and that chickadee and yellowjacket, for example, belonged in the first rank. 776 778 825

A person usually had power for one activity more than for any other, but extraordinary power along certain lines implied a general faculty in other things also.

The possession of power did not necessarily bring success. Suszen said that one could succeed in hunting without the aid of power, if he were a good runner, knew the haunts of the game, and had the other practical qualifications. On the other hand, according to the same informant, even a clever and intelligent person would be slow and lazy if he had no power. A man with special power for hunting had to be industrious and clever to secure the game. If any of his power tabus were broken — if, for example, a menstruant woman ate of his deer or bear meat, or of his mixture of berries and salmon entrails — he would fail in his subsequent attempts at hunting or fishing. 778 224 [784]

As I shall explain later, when discussing the acquisition of power, the novice seems often to have been severely endangered by his first intercourse with the guardian spirit. As the relationship matured, he brought his power more and more under friendly control. It did not desert him till he grew senile, or afflict his health as long as he complied with its ritualistic demands. 776

In certain respects, power was a private concern of the individual. One usually refrained from declaring the identity of his

5: Teit E-5 (1904-09) 1930 Southeast Salish
Coeur d'Alene

this, in after years, whenever clothes were not worn on these parts, painted all their visible scars red. Burning with live coals taken from the fire was also practiced, as well as burning with dry stalks of tule, which were lighted and allowed to burn out on the skin. Cutting is said to have been intended to let out bad blood, to make the person healthy, light-footed, active, and to prevent laziness. It also helped to inure the youth to the sight of his own blood; so that in case he was afterwards wounded, he would not faint or be alarmed. It helped him to be brave. Burning was for the purpose of enabling him to stand severe pain without flinching. Young men generally used their sweat house as a sleeping place when training in the mountains. Sweat houses were generally individual, as among the Thompson.

582 MARRIAGE.—There were no restrictions on marriage except between blood relatives. Parents (or families) tried to select husbands and wives for their children from families of good standing. Good or distinguished men, and capable, industrious women had no difficulty in obtaining the best wives and husbands. Friendship was cemented between families and feuds and quarrels sometimes settled by intermarriage. In the same way intertribal peace was made and sustained by intermarriages between the families of the chiefs. The forms of marriage were similar to those of the Thompson:[355]

583 Marriage by proposal of the man's family, followed by gifts of goods given by them to the woman's family.

Marriage by betrothal, the girl's family taking the initiative, and betrothing their daughter to the man. When she came of age, or on a prearranged date, she became his wife with or without presents from his side.

Marriage by touching or direct choosing, and proposal by the man himself, as in the marriage dance, the man proposing to the girl by touching her or dancing with her. (See p. 191.) The union was consummated with or without presents from his side. Only rarely did the girl's side give any presents.

This occurred occasionally, however, in what may be called a fourth form of marriage. A family selected a distinguished or wealthy man. Unknown to him, they sent their daughter to marry him and gave her presents for him, to make her all the more acceptable. Her parents considered it an honor to have the man as a son-in-law and to have her family connected with his. The man might refuse to take the girl to wife, but this very seldom happened.

Marriage by elopement was very rare.

585 Marriage gifts were not kept by the parents or persons receiving them, but were at once given to the other members of the family, who distributed them among themselves. Skins and robes were the

[355] a, pp. 321–325.